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PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE AND THEORY OF THE BAROQUE

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I begin with an image, exceptionally famous and, by overwhelming consensus, baroque: *Las Hilanderas* by Velásquez *(fig. 1)*. In the foreground is a homely workshop scene, with five women shown working around a spinning wheel, fashioning the threads that will go to make a decorative tapestry. In the background hangs the very kind of tapestry that is the result of this work: the stuff of nature, transformed into a thing of beauty by tools and human skill. But there is a curious doubling between the two scenes. The "background" tapestry illustrates a scene from the myth of Arachne, a mortal who became so skillful at weaving that she ventured to challenge the goddess Athena to a

1. Velásquez, "Las Hilanderas"

tapestry making contest. As Ovid tells the story, Arachne wove a picture of Europa, who was deceived by Jupiter when he disguised himself in the shape of a bull. And because Arachne's work was found to be so perfect, she was transformed by the jealous Athena into a spider: "her hair fell out, and with it both nose and ears; and the head shrank up; her whole body also grew small; the slender fingers clung to her side as legs; the rest was belly. Still from this she ever spins a thread; and now, as a spider, she exercises her time-old weaver-art" (*Metamorphoses*, VI, vv. 140-145).

As with a number of Velásquez' works, *The Spinners* can be taken as part an aesthetic reflection upon culture and the arts. On the one hand the painting identifies "culture" with the made artefact, the tapestry, which alludes to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as well as to Titian's painting of the *Rape of Europa*, which hung in the royal collection in Madrid. But on the other hand it identifies "culture" with the processes and tools by which those artefacts are fashioned. We can see the work as an analysis of art in terms of the productive processes and materials that form it; or, as I'll suggest over the course of what follows here, we can see it as engaged in a more critical questioning of the paradigm of production itself. After all, it turns out that although the tapestry scene in Velásquez is produced, it also pre-exists its artefactual production, as myth; this is, moreover, a myth that incorporates a reflection upon the relationship among the different kinds of art (Arachne's spinning and tapestry weaving on the one hand; Athena's warfare and practical wisdom on the other). As for Velásquez' painting, it seems also to reflect a conscious awareness of some of the differences between myth and art: whereas myth is given or handed down, art involves technique, which is to say, the knowledge of how to produce that which does not independently produce itself.[1]

The figure of weaving is an especially rich topos for an extension of aesthetics to cultural theory because culture has long been thought of in figurative terms as a woven fabric. The notion is as old as Plato and as modern as Deleuze and Guattari, who devote one section of *Mille Plateaux* to a discussion of textiles.[2] As for Plato, there is an important passage in the *Statesman* where the Young Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger discuss the art of weaving as a way of thinking about the relationship between two kinds of arts: those that go directly to form the products of "culture" (the so-called "productive" arts), and those "contributory" arts that in turn prepare the tools for the productive arts, "arts without whose previous assistance the specific task of the productive

[1] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 25.

[2] Along with Plato, the *locus classicus* on weaving is Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, vv. 567-87.

arts could never be performed."[3] This distinction in turn leads Socrates to identify a still more fundamental division within each of these categories: the arts of combining and those of separating. Within the art of weaving, for instance, there is the activity of carding, which pulls the strands of raw material apart, and then there is the twisting and plaiting that forms the threads and entwines them in a pattern of warp and woof. As a philosophical dialogue, the *Statesman* is itself an example of the arts of separating and combining: through the method of diaresis, it works to separate the statesman from other functionaries, including soothsayers, clerks, politicians, orators, judges, and priests. But philosophical dialogue is also synthetic, and statesmanship requires the combination of the preparatory and productive arts.[4]

I want to reserve comment on the fact that Plato's thinking about culture in relation to weaving considers the making of a garment, while Ovid and Velásquez are interested in tapestries. Much modern thinking follows Plato to the extent that it regards culture not just as a kind of fabric, but as a text and, moreover, as one that can be understood in terms of the paradigm of production. Likewise, it distinguishes among different kinds of things produced. But it is not so clear that the modern division of things produced conforms to Plato's, and still less so that the modern statesman can be thought of as responsible for weaving together the various arts, or the different strands of human nature, into a harmonious whole. In a recent essay, for instance, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben characterized modern thinking about production in terms of the difference between *poiēsis* and *praxis*. He suggested that the split between the two was solidified in relation to the development of machine technology during the industrial revolution: "With the development of modern technology, starting with the first industrial revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century, and with the establishment of an ever more widespread and alienating division of labor, the mode of presence of the things produced by man becomes double: on the one hand there are things that enter into presence according to the statute of aesthetics, that is, the works of art, and on the other hand there are those that come into being by (*technē*), that is, products in the stricter sense."[5] One

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[3] Plato, *Statesman*, 281e. The latter are the arts that "manufacture spindles, shuttles, and all the other instruments of clothes manufacture" (281e).

[4] In addition, Plato views statesmanship as requiring the ability to weave together the different strands of human nature into a harmonious social fabric. The statesman's job is to combine vigorous and aggressive traits, which provide the warp of society, with the quiet and moderation, which are its weft.

[5] Giorgio Agamben, *Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 60-61.

series of things produced would include tapestries, statues, works of music, paintings, pottery, and buildings, while the other would include things that we only sometimes think of as having been produced at all and that we seldom associate with art–things like judicial systems and codes, customs and manners, educational institutions, political structures, economic arrangements, strategies of war, scientific practices, and religious beliefs. It is of course true that Jacob Burckhardt suggested that the Renaissance state could be regarded as a work of art, and that Michel Foucault proposed that the self could itself be fashioned, and fashioned aesthetically. But both Burckhardt and Foucault regarded themselves as advancing alternatives to the prevailing ways in which cultural production was conceived.

What Agamben does not sufficiently stress is the relationship between these two series as it has been understood in post-romantic thought. By his account, "the particular status of the works of art [i.e. their status among the things that do not contain their own *telos*] has been identified with originality (or authenticity)." But this seems to credit the ideal of genius-like originality with quite a bit more than it is due. It would be more accurate and important to say that the division of production into *poiēsis* and *technē* has led to the assumption that the elements of first of these series (poems, paintings, sculptures) are dependent upon causal or explanatory factors that can be located in the second series (in economic arrangements, judicial systems, etc.). This is equally true whether it is said of individual works of art or of large-scale tendencies such as genres or period-related styles. Think of Lucien Goldmann's venerable *Sociology of the Novel*, which argues for a "rigorous homology" between the novel as a genre and the "daily life of an individualistic society born of market production,"[6] or of the writings of Spain's "Generation of '98" as rooted in a consciousness of crisis associated with the loss of Spain's American colonies. Borrowing a phrase from the political theorist Roberto Mangabeira Unger, I call such a model "deep structure" theory. Basic to it is the notion that effects at the level of a superstructure can be explained by their relation – implicitly or indirectly causal – to a base.[7] Some form of deep-structure analysis is at work in many contemporary theories of culture, even where they focus, as is increasingly the case, on issues of cultural contact and

[6] Lucien Goldmann, "Sociology of the Novel," *Telos*, no. 18 (Winter, 1973-74), p. 127. Cf. Fredric Jameson, *Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 44.

[7] In its roots, the model is Platonic. An archaic society described in the *Timaeus* reflects a strict division of labor, with the priestly class and its functions held separate from the artisans, and the artisans from the soldiers, while the shepherds, hunters, and farmers likewise perform their functions in isolation from one another. Plato's task in thinking about culture was to find their common measure and to rank them accordingly.

exchange, or on a reading of culture as a kind of text. Two principles, borrowed from Freud and Marx, inform this work. The first says that what happens in between the formative processes and their surface "effects" is determined by a series of sub-conscious or un-conscious mechanisms (ideology, repression, etc.). The second says that while the forces of power and desire driving production may be quite real, they are themselves either invisible, or visible only through their effects. In between cause and effect lie the mechanisms of distortion–the ideological distortions of power, desire's deflection of conscious aims, various other forms of *méconnaissance*. Thus it is not surprising to find that contemporary theories of cultural production so often lead to a hermeneutics of suspicion. Their goal is either to unmask the ideologies that act as screens for power and make its operation desirable, or to disclose the self-deceptive mechanisms of desire, the ones that make repression not just tolerable but also pleasurable. Fredric Jameson's well-known account of the "political unconscious" in his 1981 book of that title is meant to explain just these things.

But suppose we were to refuse the model of deep structure theory and the hermeneutics of suspicion to which it leads. Suppose we were to reject the view that art acts as a mask for power or desire. What might a theory of culture look like then, and what might its links to aesthetics be? While it is relatively well-established that the Platonic view of *poiēsis* leads us to think of art as a kind of shadow-play, it is seldom recognized that modern versions of deep structure theory can have equally undesirable effects, leading us to see art either as an ideological formation or as a kind of symptom-structure. When one reads in the Hungarian psychoanalyst Ferenczi that "all aesthetics has its root in repressed anal eroticism,"[8] or when the contemporary Marxist critic Terry Eagleton argues that the very notion of the "aesthetic artefact" is dependent upon the ideological forms of modern class society, the reductivist tendencies of deep-structure thinking become breathtakingly clear.[9]

There is no denying that deep-structure theory meets certain needs. The paradigm of production in particular can be useful in stabilizing a distinction between "things made" and "things found" or "given." But there may be other ways to deal with that distinction, and it may in the end need overturning, particularly after Duchamp, who staged a kind of aesthetic *coup d'état* when he showed that the "thing made" could be treated as if it were a "thing found," and that art could be found already made. I think a more important concern

[8] Sandor Ferenczi, "On the Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money," in *Sex in Psychoanalysis*, trans. E. Jones (New York: R Brunner, 1950), p. 325.

[9] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 3.

is that deep-structure theory tends to substitute an account of formative processes for an aesthetic interpretation of culture, presenting us with an explanation of the way in which things are made as an account of what kind of sense they make, and how. (The relevant distinction can be exemplified again by reference to *Las Hilanderas*, albeit though through a schematism that the painting eventually undoes: the foreground shows a scene of production, while the background points through style and allusion to Ovid and Titian.) Moreover, as soon as one recognizes that the modes and mechanisms of production we think of as acting upon the cultural superstructure stand in need of interpretation just as much as culture's material artefacts need to be explained, then we can see that something beyond deep-structure theory is required of any theory of culture that would take the claims of art seriously into account. For this purpose, we might begin by regarding the whole gamut of productive processes and mediating forces, including "power," "interest," "desire," and the like, as no more "fundamental" than the forms they go to shape and as standing equally in need of interpretation. The expectation of a theory of culture that would take its model from aesthetics is not just an account of productive processes, mechanisms, and tools, or a semiosis of forms, but an account of how materials are organized so as to make a world of sense. Such a theory's ideal would be a full account of the role of sensation in the making of sense. Contemporary theories that regard culture as a kind of text have relatively little to say about culture in its material sense; moreover, they give no account of what Hegel saw as a crucial task of aesthetic theory: an explanation of meaning as *embodied*. What we need for this is neither a deep-structure view of the processes of production, nor a hermeneutics of suspicion, but something closer to an aesthetic account of the relationship between the two senses of "sense."

It is here that a turn to the example of the baroque can prove especially valuable, for as the example of *Las Hilanderas* may suggest, the arts of the baroque were themselves engaged in a critical reflection about deep-structure models of culture. To this they add an acute awareness of the interplay between material texture and textual sense. But there are special challenges that one encounters when dealing with the baroque that raise the stakes in this endeavor several-fold. One of them is implicit in the very question "What is (the) baroque?" At once the description of a set of stylistic markers that can be recognized independent of history and the designation of a particular period in history, there has always been something elusive about the very notion of the "baroque." The term has all the pretense of a category-concept but none of the orderliness we would expect such a category to contain. By what

particular logic could one link Baltasar Gracián's theory of wit (*ingenio*) with Bernini's sinewy columns in the Vatican, or the oratory façade of St. Philip Neri in Rome with the poetry of Milton? The play of reflected light and space in *Las Meninas* is said to be baroque, but so too are the emblem books and, on some accounts, the *Aritmologia* of the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, the second volume of *Don Quixote,* and the German *Trauerspiel.* To invoke Wittgenstein's phrase, there is no obvious "family resemblance" among these things – either that, or the term "baroque" names so many different families that the resemblances among them are anything but clear.

The temptation to turn to history for an explanation of the baroque is thus quite powerful. The hope is that an account of historical factors can demonstrate a coherence at the deep-structure level that a description of the phenomena or a review of examples can't achieve. And yet the chronological markers that one might invoke in order to explain the baroque are anything but stable. This becomes embarrassingly apparent as soon as one confronts such anomalies as the "Hellenistic Baroque," the "Romanesque Baroque," or the "Late Gothic Baroque,"[10] i.e., cultural and aesthetic constellations that can't reasonably be explained by the same historical principles that are operative in *the* baroque (perhaps one should say the "historical" baroque or the "baroque" baroque). Just limiting oneself to the post-Renaissance (1500) world, one hardly knows whether to identify the baroque with the late 16th and 17th centuries (as might be the case for poetry and the visual arts), or with the late 17th and early 18th centuries (as might be the case for music). Historians of architecture and the visual arts impose a set of still finer distinctions among "mannerism," "baroque," and "rococo," as well as between their "northern" and "southern" variations. These distinctions have on occasion been adapted by literary historians. But even this does not always help. The period of the baroque in Spain corresponds to what is most often called "classicism" or "neo-classicism" in France.[11] Indeed, Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* moves from the end of the Renaissance in Cervantes to the "classical age" in Descartes without so much as a hiccough and with nary a nod in the direction of anything particularly baroque. Such is the view from La Tour Eiffel. For some, the answer is simply to dislodge the "baroque" from history altogether, granting it the right to migrate across the centuries and to traverse the seas. For the

[10] Ervin Panofsky, "What Is Baroque?" in *Three Essays on Style* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 20.

[11] The issue has been discussed by, among others, Louis Marin in his essay on Versailles, "Classical, Baroque: Versailles, or the Architecture of the Prince," in *Yale French Studies,* 80: *Baroque Topographies: Literature/ History/ Philosophy,*" ed. Timothy Hampton (1991), 167-182.

Catalan critic Eugenio D'Ors, anything that is marked by exuberance or excess, including much of what we would call Romanticism, may count as an example of the baroque.[12] D'Ors' "baroque" is a constant of human nature that seems to manifest itself at periodic intervals in history. The novelist Alejo Carpentier could link the baroque to the conditions of *mestisaje* characteristic of Latin America, whose exotic literature, flora, and fauna, he saw as "naturally baroque." Never mind the cultivated gardens of Schönbrunn, Aranjuez, or Versailles: the Latin American baroque counts the ancient cosmogonies of *Chilám Balám* and the *Popol Vuh*.[13]

Some 25 years ago, in a book called *La Cultura del barroco* (*The Culture of the Baroque*), the Spanish social historian José Antonio Maravall attempted to put an end to some of this confusion by declaring "baroque" to be a circumscribed historical phenomenon with strict chronological limits.[14] His goal was to be both historical and deep-structural. Anything in Europe between 1600 and 1675 (but especially between 1605 and 1650, and especially in Spain) was decreed to be "baroque" and any theory of the baroque would have to explain it, granting of course sufficient latitude to take certain national and regional differences into account. Moreover–and this was the audacious part — Maravall de-coupled the notion of the "baroque" from any essential relation to art. The formalism that allowed art historians like Wölfflin and Panofsky to make some sense of the baroque by reference to a grammar of style was banished with a single stroke.[15] On Maravall's account, the culture of the baroque emerged when and as it did as the consequence of a crisis in the economic order of society. More specifically, Maravall argued that the development of pre-capitalist economic formations produced in response a culture that (1) was controlled by hegemonic institutions, particularly those of political absolutism; (2) was a culture of the masses; (3) was predominantly urban; and (4) was conservative in its political outlook. Maravall was by no

[12] Eugenio D'Ors, *Lo Barroco* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1993).

[13] Alejo Carpentier, "Lo Barroco y lo real maravilloso" (1975), in *Obras completas*, 13: *Ensayos* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1990), pp. 167ff.

[14] Compare the pragmatist view that would regard the baroque as a kind of "lump," and in response to which we would identity "the place of the lump, or of that *sort* of lump, in somebody's view of something other than the science to which the lump has been assigned (for example, the role of gold in the international economy, in 16th century alchemy, in Alberich's fantasy life, in my fantasy life, and so forth, as opposed to its role in chemistry)." Richard Rorty, "Texts and Lumps" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 86.

[15] For Maravall, art was merely the way in which a change in epoch related to a consciousness of crisis was noted by Burckhardt and Gurlitt. See José Antonio Maravall, *La Cultura del barroco* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1975), pp. 29-30.

means the first to attempt a sociological understanding of the baroque. Critics before him, notably Werner Weisbach, had suggested important links between the baroque and Counter-Reformation religious practices, and Arnold Hauser's *Social History of Art* took considerable pains to understand the baroque in the context of broad-scale changes in the social landscape of early modern Europe. But Maravall was among the first, perhaps *the* first, to neutralize the differences among various domains of culture (religion, politics, philosophy, literature, the visual arts, etc.) in an effort to see them as an inter-linked whole springing from a common source:

> it's not that baroque painting, the baroque economy, the baroque art of war, [and so on] don't resemble one another.... but rather, given the fact that they develop in the same circumstances, under the same conditions, answering the same vital needs, responding to the modifying influence of all the other factors, each one of them finds itself thus transformed, and comes to depend on the epoch as a whole.... These are the terms in which one can ascribe the definitive character of a period–in this case its character as baroque–to theology, painting, the art of war, physics, to an economy in crisis, monetary upheaval, the uncertainty of credit, and economic wars, along with which came the growing control of agricultural property by the nobility and an increase in poverty among the masses; these factors created a feeling of uncertainty and instability in personal and social life, which was dominated by repressive forces that in turn shaped baroque man and that allow us to call him by this name (*Culture of the Baroque*, pp. 28-29).

The observations about "baroque man" notwithstanding, Maravall's remains an impressive account for the sheer breadth of territory it attempts to cover. And yet it raises questions that very nearly undermine the claims it wants to make, to wit: what, if anything, is "baroque" about this particular constellation of cultural forms? What is "baroque" about the politics of absolutism, Loyolan spirituality, or etiquette at the court of Philip II?[16] If questions of style are not themselves at issue, then why characterize this urban culture of masses and its underlying crisis in aesthetic terms at all? One could well answer that the dominant cultural institutions of this period all relied upon the arts to establish and project their power, that baroque theatre was one of the means by which an absolutist court was able to secure and extend its reach, and that baroque painting was a way in which Counter-Reformation beliefs were disseminated. Maravall himself admits that it was in the realm of

[16] I discuss this particular question in *Ideologies of History in the Spanish Golden Age* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1997).

the arts that the historical transformations of the baroque were first noted. But we can expect more of a theory of culture than this one-fold set of inversions will allow. For if the challenge is to present an account of culture as including both the series of "things produced" as well as the materials and tools that contribute to their production, then the goal should be not just to discover the way in which, e.g., baroque theatre was driven by political absolutism or the way in which baroque painting helped inculcate Counter-Reformation beliefs, but also to see the ways in which Counter-Reformation spirituality was pictorial and political absolutism theatrical. Examples of this sort could well be multiplied, but the limit-cases are probably the notions of a "baroque economy," or of "baroque society," which we (or Maravall) want to treat both as effects (i.e. as among the phenomena to be explained) and as causes (i.e. as offering us explanations for other effects).

Rather than invoke theories of cultural production or textuality in order to interpret the culture of the baroque, my suggestion is the reverse: to take the baroque as a model for the kind of analysis that a philosophy of culture ought to provide. The reasons for foregrounding the arts in this particular enterprise are compelling. Above all, they help model culture as a self-positing set of practices that are related to one another in ways that deep-structure theory may be unable to recognize. The model is not one of surface and depth but one of effects that are answered by other effects, none of which can be traced back to a determinate cause.[17] The question "What were the underlying factors that can explain the baroque?" as a phenomenon within the history of culture can be answered best if we recognize that this is a moment when art strove to establish itself as reaching just as "deep" as anything that we might wish to identify as its cause–and, I would add, as existing just as much on the surface. The point of baroque illusionism is that the model of surface and depth turns out to be of limited use unless we can somehow account for the energy of the surface and for the density of forms involved in the making of sense. This is one reason why I think it would also be right to see the arts of the baroque as undermining the difference between "ornament" and "essential line" rather than as establishing a view of art as ornamental. Think of the pillars of Bernini's baldachino in St. Peter's in Rome as an example *(fig. 2)*. In comparison to columns that merely are decorated or embellished by an accretion of detail on the surface, Bernini's pillars mark a moment when ornament turns the difference between "inside" and "outside" on its head, for the structure and function of the inside are themselves enfolded in the surface.

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[17] Cf. the stoics, who relate causes to causes; and cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

2. Bernini, St. Peter's, Rome, baldachino

More often than not, complaints about the "decadence" or "bad taste" of the baroque mask ethically-charged concerns about the loss of a necessary connection between an interior "essence" and its exterior face. But the matter of that connection is something that baroque art itself worried about to a notable degree. It has often been said that in baroque architecture the façade is freed from any essential connection to interior volume. The result is not so much an ornamented exterior, or even the layering of one surface on top of another, but the creation of an autonomous interior space, which is to say, of an interiority that is not obliged to

3. Emmanuel de Witte, "Interor with a Woman at a Clavicord"

face the external world[18] *(fig. 3)*. This is the problem of the "empty inside." Dutch painting specializes in the cultivation of just this sort of autonomous inside, where the expansion of the interior proceeds by virtue of seemingly limitless re-framings; within there stands (or sits) a virtually windowless self, inscrutable and monad-like. The Leibnitzian-monadistic critique of mechanistic explanations of perception and thought gives us a grand tour of the empty inside: "Perception, and that which depends upon it, are inexplicable by mechanical causes," writes Leibnitz in the *Monadology*; "suppose that there were a machine so constructed as to produce thought, feeling, and perception, we could imagine it increased in size while retaining the same proportions, so that one could enter it as one might a mill. On going inside we should see only the parts impinging upon one another; we should not see anything that would explain perception."[19]

The problem of the empty inside in turn leaves us with a structure and a skin. I think of the way Caravaggio depicts peeling *(fig. 4)*, but even more so

4. Caravaggio, "Boy Peeling a Fruit"

[18] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibnitz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 29.

[19] Leibnitz, *Monadology*, sec. 17, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 181.

of the special interest that Ribera takes in martyrdom by flaying, or by emaciation, as in his paintings of St. Bartholomew and St. Andrew. Such images register the attempt to redeem the emptiness of the inside by exerting a moral force at the very surface of things. But how surprisingly difficult it can be to tell aestheticism and asceticism apart! One is just as likely to find ascetic practices as a kind of aestheticism that counts on the most candid display of flesh, as in some of Caravaggio's works (e.g. *Cupid, Bacchus*). But think also of the great popularity of fireworks in the baroque,[20] which have been characterized by none other than Adorno as a pure aesthetic "effect," as "apparition par excellence ... [as] empirical appearance free of the burden of empirical being."[21]

While there may always be a risk of aestheticism associated with the baroque, always a question of why press the materials to yield this much and not more, why add this much ornament and not more, or less, why include just this many members in a series–and never an entirely satisfying answer, I also think that the art of the baroque works especially hard to bring such aesthetic questions to the level of critical self-consciousness. (It is also the question of why just this much *asceticism* and not more.) This critical questioning sets it apart from other forms of illusionistic play or from other instances of aesthetic exuberance, embellishment, or ornamental excess. And so if the baroque can be associated with certain emphases of style, it is also the moment when style is raised to such a level of self-consciousness that it comes to serve as an organizing principle for culture itself.

Take Annibale Carracci's *Dead Christ* as a case in point *(fig. 5)*. The painting is as much "about" the ability of style to create the forced perspective from which the suffering Christ is viewed as it is about the redemptive powers of that suffering. An intensity of pain is transferred, through the power of style, into an intensity of point of view; the universal meaning of the Crucifixion is subsumed under a radical foreshortening that everywhere bespeaks the ability of art to compete with the power of belief. The result is not so much the expression of a universal religious truth from a subjective point of view as

[20] See for example Kazimierz Siemienowicz, *Grand art d'artillerie*, (1651). For historical accounts see Eberhard Fahler, *Feuerwerke des Barock* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974); Alan St. Hill Brock, *A History of Fireworks* (London: Harrap, 1949); Henry Burnell Faber, *Military Pyrotechnics* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919); and George Plimpton, *Fireworks* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

[21] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 120. This description is surprisingly close to Enrique Lafuente Ferrari's characterization of "Las Hilanderas" as "pure appearance, pure visuality," as "reality subjectivated to the extreme limit, to the point where it seems about to vanish." Lafuente-Ferrari, *Velásquez* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p. 94.

5. Caracci, "Dead Christ"

the creation of an organized surface wherein perspective is a prior condition for the appearance of any truth. Perspective implies the necessity of seeing things from a finite place, but here "place" implies both the definiteness of physical location and something like the focus of conscious attention. Panofsky gets close to this idea when he argues that spatial tensions in baroque art produce a "subjective intensification,"[22] but I think he misses the point that such intensification registers the fact that subjectivity is a condition for viewing surfaces that in turn creates an intensity in the surfaces.

As for the wider range and ramifications of such efforts, architecture and painting place the powers of line, plane, and sphere in the service of a broad-gauge reappraisal of the hierarchies between the "upper" and "lower" worlds, both of which are seen as indispensable facets of "culture" in spite of the fact that they may be incompatible. The results are visible in the complexity of surfaces characteristic of the baroque. In Velásquez's *Kitchen Scene* showing Christ in the house of Mary and Martha framed through a window in the background, for instance, the eye is forced to shift constantly between two

[22] See Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, p. 51.

scenes; these echo one another but never quite connect. They are discontinuous, or merely adjacent, and yet we are unable to say exactly how or why. Is the background scene a painted image meant to be read as temporally disjunct from what we see in the foreground? Or are we meant to be looking through a window onto a biblical scene, in which case the two moments coexist in time but are spatially disjunct?[23] The work says something about the relationship between different forms of life: Mary or Martha? The *vita activa* or the *vita contemplativa*? Those questions are articulated in the context of a critique of the relations between sacred and secular worlds that no longer counts on a cosmos divided into evaluatively distinct upper and lower realms. Such divisions, inherited from Plato and from Christian neo-platonism, may persist in the baroque. The neo-Platonic tradition in particular imagined many floors, or levels, of Being, which were linked from beginning to end in a "Great Chain" of essences. But the arts of the baroque took it upon themselves to question the underlying structure and order of those links,[24] and posed the question of whether they could be re-established on some other grounds.[25] One of the most often overlooked sites for the work involved in such questioning is the stair. If a staircase connect levels – architectural, spiritual, or otherwise – then what connects the steps within the stairs? One worry is that such "connections" may depend upon a logic of adjacency and nothing more, and it remains far from clear just how strong a bond adjacency can provide.

If one of the concerns of the baroque was to build a rich and meaningful surface from the juxtaposition of material forms, then we might well want to know how the elements comprising the surface are bound. What degree of disruption can they sustain? Take Hans Holbein's most famous painting, "The Ambassadors," as a case in point. The painting shows the world of "culture"

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[23] "Whether this is meant to be an actual scene glimpsed on the wall is not clear. The ambiguity is intentional on Velásquez's part," Lafuente-Ferrari, *Velásquez*, p. 35. Leibnitz might describe them as "incompossible," i.e. they belong to two equally possible but incommensurable worlds (see also Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 60).

[24] Or to break their connections to magic bonds. Cf. for example Giordano Bruno, "General Account of Bonding."

[25] It is Kant's explicit project in the *Critique of Judgment* to repair the breach between his own version of these "two worlds"; this is the role of aesthetic reflection: "The realm of the concept of nature under the one legislation, and that of the concept of freedom under the other, are completely cut off from all reciprocal influence ... by the broad gulf that divides the supersensible from phenomena.... This faculty [judgment] ... provides us with the mediating concept between concepts of nature and concepts of freedom – a concept that makes possible the transition from the pure theoretical [legislation of understanding] to the pure practical [legislation of reason]." *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 37-38.

rendered with meticulous care. The two statesmen in the picture – Jean de Dinteville, French ambassador to the English court, and George de Selve, soon to be named Bishop of Lavaur – have succeeded in combining many different arts, if not in a weave of warp and woof, as in Plato, then by a logic of adjacency that helps to create the semblance of a meaningful world. In the objects of the painting we recognize music and poetry, but also science, and so mathematics, navigation, and astronomy. And yet there is a tension in the painting between the arrangement of identifiable things – their more or less coherent formation as a legible "scene" of diplomatic statecraft – and the anamorphic skull, which cannot be woven into this scene and is not "adjacent" to anything else within the image-space. It has come as if from some other place. Seen from the perspective of the artefacts of "culture," the skull remains a blur; to attempt to bring it into the world of diplomatic culture requires the efforts of twisting, flattening, and compression. But by the same token, if you attempt to read the world of culture from the perspective of the skull then culture becomes an indecipherable blur. The statesman-like ideal of diplomacy as a peaceful linkage among territories around the globe is inconsistent with the force of a perspective whose dis-location is irreconcilable with the cultural order that statesmanship and the arts provide.[26]

One response to this unnerving challenge to culture is to re-order the world around the skull, to meet the force of its distortion with that of an equally intense aesthetic concentration. Such is the ambition of certain types of "devotional" painting. Their hope is to transpose an unidentifiable force into an intensely organized play of light and dark. But another response is simply to accept the fact that there are limits to the level of organization that we might ever expect to find within the cultural field. In Walter Benjamin's study of German baroque drama, for instance, the *Trauerspiel* depends upon a semiotics of "allegory" in which "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else."[27] The implication is that "culture" amounts to a constellation of things that are neither similar nor dissimilar in nature, much less vitally or logically linked, and only tenuously adjacent. In Benjamin's view, the space "in between" things is filled with neither desire nor power nor force but with a melancholia that records their absence. ("The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself ... is allegory," p. 185). In an image sometimes

[26] Moreover, the skull is not just death but a distortion of death, a *memento mori* that, unlike the tapestry in Velásquez' work, is so displaced from the context of its original sense as to be nearly unrecognizable – assuming that it can be associated with something like a context of origination at all.

[27] Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), p. 175.

attributed to Caravaggio, dead birds are related to one another by a logic of parataxis and not much more *(fig. 6)*. And, whether it is a matter of globes and telescopes, teacups and combs, or a string of dead birds, it may be the case that mere adjacency in time and place will never yield more than an association of "this" and "that," or of "this" and "this."[28] The effect is to equate the work of art with its minimal requirement, composition; just putting things together becomes a goal in itself.

If there is nothing at the deep-structure level that holds the series of "made things" together from beginning to end, it will be little surprise to find that the arts of the baroque flaunt discontinuity and disarray as a condition of culture itself.[29] "Culture" is imagined as a kind of collection, usually of disparate things, and sometimes with maximum disregard for the organizing force of their original social or geographical contexts. Hence the interest in "composite" architectural scenes featuring buildings – usually in the form of ruins – whose relationship to one another may be independent of their location in time and/or place. Hence also the great interest in the adjacency of the different arts and in the production of "synaesthetic" forms. Already in *Las*

6. "Still Life with Birds" (Caravaggio?)

[28] If this is the case, then what is taken apart can also be put back together in new and different combinations. Hence the function of wit as a form of invention that works by yoking two otherwise unrelated things together. The greater the distance between the terms involved, the more powerful the example of wit.

[29] Cf. Benjamin on "'The Confused Court'" as a model for allegory, "subject to the law of 'dispersal' and collectedness,'" *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 188.

Hilanderas painting "incorporates" tapestry making, and tapestry in turn incorporates other painting and myth. But baroque architecture incorporates sculpture, and baroque painting incorporates architecture, while painted buildings can likewise incorporate paintings of painting. Karsten Harries observed that the pictorialization of architectural ornament was central to Bavarian Church design in the 17th and 18th centuries, and that such ornaments eventually grew into the pictorialization of architecture itself: ceilings that begin as support and shelter against the sky eventually became representations of the heavens.[30] As each of the arts extends its reach, the result is a "composite" realm, which is to say an aesthetic domain whose organization expands upon the same principle that appears to be at work within each of the individual arts. Composition, the technique of putting things together in a place, yields a fusion of media and forms; the series becomes the pile or the heap. Bernini, the architect of St. Peter's in Rome, is credited with having been the first to idealize such a goal as "beautiful"; most interesting of all, perhaps, the Berninian ideal of the *bel composto* was conceived as independent of anything inherent in the relations among materials, techniques, design, color, form, etc.[31]

Ideals of "com-position" and effects of synaesthetic "fusion" can be useful in modeling culture's quality as an aggregate, lump-like thing with quite a bit less consistency than deep-structure theories tend to expect. The question is whether these notions can provide some of the most basic things we would expect of a philosophy of culture, such as a description of how the arts and practices stand together or in relation to place. If the baroque is an urban phenomenon then what does this mean for culture's relationship to cultivation? If it is cosmopolitan and transhistorical then what role does it play in the process of defining, dividing, and relating different territorial regions or historical or political sites? While these questions may be too large to answer here, I would nonetheless recall that Plato's image of weaving in the *Statesman* occurs in relation to the fashioning of a garment meant to protect the body from the weather, while Ovid and Velásquez are interested in the weaving of tapestries. Deleuze and Guattari in turn characterize these two–

[30] Karsten Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Asceticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 21.

[31] See Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, II (New York: Oxford University Press for the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1975), p. 143. Filippo Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini (the artist's son) wrote: "It is the general opinion that Bernini was the first to attempt to unify architecture with sculpture and painting in such a way as to make of them all a beautiful whole [*un bel composto*], and that he achieved this by occasionally departing from the rules, without actually violating them" (cited in Lavin, p. 6).

clothes-fabric and tapestry-fabric–as the paradigmatic types of textiles, at least among cultures that define themselves in relation to a fixed location (i.e. sedentary cultures). This is because clothing and tapestries "annex the body and exterior space, respectively, to the immobile house: fabric [in these two forms] integrates the body and the outside into a closed space."[32] The house in turn transforms a number of biological functions, such as procreation and eating; already for Vitruvius it was the basis of the public sphere. But lest these notions of territory and house leave us with an understanding of "culture" in functional terms, it may be useful to bear in mind that, at least as Deleuze sees it, already, prior to the house, "the territory implies the emergence of pure sensory qualities, of sensibilia that cease to be merely functional and become expressive features, enabling the transformation of purely pragmatic purposes into what we would be satisfied to call culture or art."[33] Within the baroque Leibnitz recognized the limitations involved in thinking about place in terms of structure or function, much less as the cause of whatever happens in it. Place for Leibnitz was also quality, and, finally, an expression of the reversibility of active and passive modes of being in the world. To quote just briefly from the essay on the principle of indiscrenibles, "that which has a place must express place in itself; so that distance and the degree of distance involves also a degree of expressing in the thing itself a remote thing, either of affecting it or of receiving an affection from it.... in fact, situation really involves a degree of expressions" ("On the Principle of Indiscernibles," in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 133).

Following Leibnitz, Gilles Deleuze proposed a theory of the baroque that abandons the model of deep structure in favor of the notion of an expressive "operation" directed to an account of surfaces. The specific nature of the baroque operation is folding: "[The baroque] endlessly produces folds. The baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other."[34] The fold serves as both figure and concept, and it has a value that is at once descriptive and analytical. The interest in works like Caravaggio's *Narcissus* or El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* is to show that all that is needed in order to begin the operation of folding is a single division or echo in space; everything else follows from it. Indeed, the problem

[32] Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 476.

[33] Gilles Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 183.

[34] Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 3.

is not so much how to initiate the process of folding but how, once begun, to get the folding to stop[35] *(fig. 7)*.

The Leibnitz-Deleuze notion of the fold replaces that of the Platonic weave. Moreover, it concentrates in ways that deep structure theory does not on the texture of the material in question. Remember that while the Leibnitzian monad is a "simple substance" there is within it a mani-foldedness that allows it to take on distinctive attributes and to change: "There must be differentiation within that which changes ... [this] must involve a plurality within the unity of the simple ... And consequently the simple must contain a large number of affections and relations, although it has no parts" (*Monadology*, secs. 12, 13, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 180). One of the great attractions of this notion for an aesthetic theory of culture is that it allows us to account for

7. Pilgrimage Church, Wies (Bavaria), statue

[35] On this point, Deleuze thinks exactly the reverse: "The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity" (*The Fold*, p. 34).

the qualities of things and not merely for their essence, or rather to see quality as itself essential. At the limit of the calculus of the series lies the science of characteristics, or at least this is the great Leibnitzian hope.[36] Qualities are determined less by the nature of their component parts or by their underlying causes than by the *manner* in which simple substances are folded (hence the connection between the style known as "mannerism" and the baroque): "That is what Leibnitz stated when he invoked the 'paper or the tunic.' Everything is folded in its own manner, cord and rod, but also colors distributed according to the concavity and convexity of the luminous rays... Texture does not depend on the parts themselves but on strata that determine its 'cohesion'" (Deleuze, *The Fold*, pp. 36-37).

The operation of folding envelops "deep structure" causes, mechanisms, and motives in the surface, at least until such time as they may become submerged or shadowed by some other fold. Among the principles that enable this thinking is the Leibnitzian notion that "the predicate lies in the subject" (Leibnitz, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 135). This aesthetic concept of agency can provide a useful modification of deep structure models of production and can likewise help guard against the reductivism that takes culture as grid-like surface to be deciphered. Deleuze may be right to say that the abandonment of the ideal of art as a "window on the world" eventually yielded to that of the surface as a plane on which "lines, numbers, and changing characters are inscribed" (*The Fold*, pp. 3, 27). Deleuze has the work of Robert Rauschenberg in mind, but I believe it would be fairer to think of the informational grid, or even the combinatorial matrix, which results from a flattening of the fold and the elimination of the texture of the weave.

By contrast, the baroque arts suggest a view of culture as a textured surface that is neither the (ideological) effect of a deep structure cause nor a grid of information. Whatever lies down "deep" must somehow be understood to act not just through its power to organize and produce surfaces, but by means of its own envelopment in them.[37] The result is a view of culture as a realm of effects for which there is no determinate, underlying, deep structure cause, but as a domain in which motives and cause are themselves transposed

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[36] "The art of combinations in particular is, in my opinion, the science which treats of the forms of things or of formulae in general (it could also be called generally the science of *quality* in general, or, of forms). That is, it is the science of *quality* in general, or, of the like and the unlike, according as various formulae arise from the combination of *a, b, c,* etc., whether they represent quantities or something else. It is distinguished from algebra, which is concerned with formulae applied to *quantity*, i.e. with the equal and the unequal." *Of Universal Synthesis and Analysis*, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 17.

[37] See Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, p. 124.

to the surface and energize it. There is a grammar and a mode of agency that can be associated with these effects, but it is not one that we are accustomed to recognize from the models of causality that work in the physical world. Consider the example of façades that curve (St. Philip Neri Oratory, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane), of columns that twist (Bernini), or of trees that bend in response to no identifiable force in nature (*fig. 8*). Insofar as these torsions are effects standing in need of causal explanation at all, we might do best to describe them as self-caused. They are phenomena of the sort that we might associate with a psychology of subjective consciousness, were it possible to ascribe subjectivity to such things. Building on Leibnitz' notion of the "predicate in the subject," one can locate the rough equivalent of this logic within the field of "characterology," which takes a special interest in passions that overwhelm whatever causal account of them we might be able to provide. (Rosalind Krauss's observations on Rodin's *Adam* move in a similar direction: "What outward cause produces this torment of bearing in the *Adam*? What internal armature can one imagine, as one looks on from the outside, to explain the possibilities of their distention? Again one feels backed against a wall of unintelligibility. For it is not as though there is a *different* viewpoint one could seek from which to find those answers. Except one; and that is not

8. Hobbema, "Middleharnis Avenue"

9. Villabrille, "Head of St. Paul"

exactly a *place* from which to look at the work – any of Rodin's work – but, rather, a condition. This condition might be called a belief in the manifest intelligibility of *surfaces*, and that entails relinquishing certain notions of cause as it relates to meaning, or accepting the possibility of meaning without the proof or verification of cause. It would mean accepting effects themselves as self-explanatory – as significant even in the absence of what one might think of as the logical background from which they emerge."[38]) In such cases the result is a surface that can't be characterized as either active or passive, shallow or deep. It is at once a "pure effect" and the result of indeterminate causes. Even where the aesthetic surface is organized as a grid, there is what Deleuze describes as a "surface tension" at work in it,[39] which is to say that one must reckon with effects that follow from its organization *as* a surface that appeals to sense. The culture of the baroque excels in the cultivation of just this kind of surface tension, producing energies that can't be reduced to any underlying cause. And so it is with "culture" itself, which is neither a formative process

[38] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 26
[39] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, pp. 124-125.

nor a collection of things produced, and as much like a lump as a text *(fig. 9)*. But lest the image of the lump make culture sound too inert, I should add that it is a lump whose self-positing and expressive qualities are everywhere foregrounded in the baroque. The energy that gathers in its surfaces provides an aesthetically rich model for thinking about culture as such.